

# Some Aspects of the War

as viewed by

Naturalized British Subjects

BY

AUGUST COHN

OF THE MIDDLE TEMPLE, BARRISTER-AT-LAW

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1917

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A Committee has been formed and has decided to convene a meeting at the earliest possible moment, with the object of giving expression to this feeling which cannot but be universal among naturalized Britons. We hereby call upon all naturalized British subjects of German or Austro-Hungarian birth to communicate without delay their willingness to attend such a meeting.

A 2



striking, and the proposed meeting was held at the Memorial Hall at which a large gathering of naturalized British subjects unanimously adopted the following resolution :

‘We desire to identify ourselves with and fully share the national sentiments evoked by the War which has been forced upon this country.

‘We express our horror and indignation at the methods of warfare employed by the enemy.

‘We again declare our faithful and true allegiance to His Majesty the King and affirm our sincere devotion to the Country of our adoption.

‘We gratefully acknowledge the recognition of our rights and privileges as British subjects.

‘And conscious of the duties and obligations of our citizenship, we unreservedly place at the disposal of His Majesty’s Government any service which we can render in furtherance of an early and victorious conclusion of the War.’

The Council of Loyal British Subjects of German, Austrian, or Hungarian Birth was formed immediately after the meeting to give effect to the sentiments and to carry out the objects expressed in the Resolution.

This pamphlet was issued by the Council in the early part of 1916 with a view to refuting the denials of German aggression and allegations of England’s guilt which are persisted in by Germany’s rulers and German publicists in defiance of truth and historic facts.

The pamphlet has been translated into seven foreign languages and widely circulated abroad.

## SOME ASPECTS OF THE WAR AS VIEWED BY NATURALIZED BRITISH SUBJECTS

‘WHY do these men who were born and bred in Germany or Austria come forward with the avowed intention of demonstrating to the world that the responsibility for this War rests with the countries of their birth?’ is the question which will be asked by those who read this paper, be they Englishmen, Allies, or Neutrals, and it demands an answer at the very outset. Only if our motives are understood can we hope to carry conviction to the mind of the reader; unless our sincerity be undoubted and our good faith unquestioned our effort must prove barren. And we give the answer which goes to the root of the matter with which we are dealing: ‘Because we have emerged from the state of political pupillage and tutelage in which the Germans live, and because we know that the vast majority of men in the countries from which we spring would share our views were they not so politically docile and credulous, had they not surrendered their intellect and conscience along with their political aspirations to their Prussian masters.’

Independence of speech is difficult and rare in Germany in times of peace; it is practically impossible and non-existent now, and we may therefore hope that even there the number of those who know full well that England did not make the War and that Germany is not the unoffending victim of world-jealousy is greater than

would appear to be the case. Be that as it may, we have the inestimable advantage of living under a constitution which allows and encourages freedom of thought and utterance, and we should be doing less than our duty were we not to declare frankly and unequivocally what in our opinion admits of no doubt, viz. : that the world would have been spared this immeasurable calamity but for the abject and servile faith that the German peoples put in Prussia, but for the willingness with which they became the tools of Prussia's and the Hohenzollerns' insatiable ambition. We use the word Prussia in its narrow historical meaning. The citizens of many provinces like the Rhine Province, Westphalia, Hanover, Saxony, which are technically included in the present Kingdom of Prussia, have nothing Prussian in character, and are as different as those of the other German States from the people who inhabit the barren and monotonous desert, Historic Prussia. But they, as well as the Bavarians and Wurtembergers and the people of the free Hansa towns, with their glorious civic history, have given their soul to the idol of Prussian militarism, have yielded to the Prussian spirit which is the very negation of whatever is noblest and purest in the German genius, have surrendered their political rights in exchange for a temporary and precarious protection. By reason of our knowledge of German literature, familiarity with the German press, personal observations during visits to Germany, relations of personal or professional or business character with various classes of Germans, we have had opportunities, which are denied to the vast majority of Englishmen, of observing and marking the political development in Germany. We have been dismayed at the gradual but



clearly perceptible growth of the influence of the military oligarchy, the reactionary policy pursued in Prussia, and from there insidiously spread over the rest of Germany until, almost unknown to Germans but obvious to the intelligent observer, Prussian militarist influence and authority and Prussian political methods had become paramount even in those German States and among those German peoples who had in comparatively recent years regarded Prussia and her people with barely concealed dislike and suspicion. One of the reasons for this slavish submission—foreign to the German nature—to Prussian rule is a recognition of Prussia's alleged great achievement in creating German unity. We who have discarded the glasses through which the German is taught to read history may be permitted to doubt the soundness of the assertion of Prussia's services. It may well be that future historians will hold that Prussia in fact retarded German unity until it could be brought about on a basis compatible with Prussia's ambition, that the unity was inevitable and that it could have been achieved otherwise than by blood and iron and at the cost of the confiscation of popular liberty; but while the belief holds it explains much of the relations between Prussia and the rest of Germany.

Those among us who visited Germany at the time of the trial of Colonel Reuter in connexion with the 'Zabern' affair were surprised and pained to find that even men who professed to be Liberals and jealous of the due recognition of civil authority, who would have vehemently disclaimed any leaning towards reactionary tendencies, desired the acquittal of the Colonel and received the result of the trial with satisfaction and thank-

fulness. That this result carried military arrogance and presumption far beyond anything known in modern history, that the effect was to proclaim the military caste sacrosanct and set up a military despotism in times of peace, did not seem to perturb Germans who in other respects would be entitled to rank as sober-minded, intelligent, and cultured people. Nothing could have made us realize more plainly how completely the German people had succumbed to the glamour of Prussia's military power and prestige and to what extent they had been hypnotized by the glittering helmet of the War Lord. Men who in former years had been alarmed at the despotic temper of the Kaiser, his self-assertion and aggressiveness and had feared that his indiscretions might compromise the nation and embroil Germany with other Powers, were now blind to the true significance of 'Zabern'. They were unable to see how infinitely more dangerous is an unscrupulous military oligarchy than the most absolute autocrat, and whither it was bound to lead the nation sooner or later.

The history of Prussian ascendancy during the last twenty years is the history of the origin of this War. We who have not lived in Germany during the period of these reactionary changes have observed them all the more acutely because we had moved in the opposite direction; we had participated in and profited by the progress, the growth of political freedom in the country of which we had become citizens. While Prussian reaction put the fetters on democratic development, English people matured and advanced in political wisdom. As the enthusiasm for social reform grew in England the desire to preserve the peace of the world

increased and few indeed were the champions of aggressive imperialism. On the other hand, in Germany the Government furthered and encouraged—in schools, at universities, in literature, and on the stage—the doctrine that the warlike nations inherit the earth, that the last goal and highest aspiration of a great nation is a victorious war. While English statesmen addressed their minds to the expansion of a constitution, the superior worth of which rests on the assumption of peaceful relations between England and other great nations, German statesmen applied their ingenuity and directed the vast and increasing financial, material, and scientific resources of the country to one object—the perfection of the machinery for war for the purposes of aggrandisement. Yet—and that is one of the strange inconsistencies in the conduct of the German Government—when they were ready to launch the bolt which shattered the civilization of Europe they shrank from an avowal of the ‘ideal’ to the teaching of which they had devoted such infinite care. Then war was no longer the noble and elevating thing, the legitimate goal of a great nation; it had suddenly become a calamity which Germany had striven to avoid but which her aggressive, unscrupulous, and envious enemies had forced upon her; and as the awful consequences of her great crime against humanity have accumulated the professions of Germany’s innocence have become louder and more frequent and the assertions of England’s guilt more violent. Whether this change was due to an apprehension that despite the systematic preparation for war the German people had not yet become sufficiently Prussianized to support wholeheartedly and enthusiastically a war of aggression, or to an anxiety to propitiate



neutral nations, it is hard to determine; it is probable that both considerations operated, but it is difficult to believe that this shameless fraud could succeed anywhere outside the Central Empires.

Not only is there a complete absence of evidence of a desire on the part of either the British Government or the British nation to engage in a war with Germany, but the world has incontrovertible proof that until the last moment the Government struggled hard to preserve peace, and we are witnesses of the earnestness with which the British people supported their Government's endeavours. Indeed, we are confirmed in our view of the part which His Majesty's Government played in those days when Europe stood on the brink by no less an authority than Dr. von Bethmann-Hollweg. On the 4th of August, when it suited his purpose to lay the guilt on Russia, he told the Reichstag that England tried in co-operation with Germany to mediate between Austria and Russia, and in the German White Book he said: 'Shoulder to shoulder with England we laboured incessantly, &c., &c.,' and supported his statement by detailed references to Sir E. Grey's endeavours in the text of the White Book and the telegrams published in the Appendix thereto. The most striking tribute to the British Government's exertions to maintain peace is to be found in Germany's declaration of war against Russia, a document every word of which, one may assume, was considered and weighed: 'Sa Majesté l'Empereur d'Allemagne, d'accord avec l'Angleterre, était appliqué à accomplir un rôle médiateur auprès des Cabinets de Vienne et de Saint-Pétersbourg.' It is true that Dr. von Bethmann-Hollweg declared four months later, and has ever since continued to declare,

that England was the instigator of the War, but he has never, as far as we know, attempted to reconcile these declarations with the statement made in that solemn document at a moment which must have been to him the most solemn of his life.

According to German propagandists, the British Government, which had embarked on schemes of social reform of unprecedented magnitude, whose policy had been directed towards one aim only, viz.: to improve the condition of the people, the Government, which steadfastly declined to add to the military forces or make provision for a participation in a Continental war, and whose supporters had grudged every increase in expenditure on armaments which Germany's naval policy forced upon this country, had planned and schemed and plotted to provoke a war with Germany. If blame does attach to our Government in respect of its conduct towards Germany it can only be for the refusal to believe that goodwill and fair dealing would not ultimately induce Germany to relax the stupendous and ruinous preparations she was known to be making.

In the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, German statesmen and German newspapers have the audacity to maintain that the War is the result of a carefully designed conspiracy on the part of England to rid herself of an inconvenient trade rival. It is inconceivable that a proposition so preposterous on the face of it should find credence with one single intelligent person outside Germany, for, apart from the absence of any evidence in support of it, the fact that from a military point of view England was absolutely unprepared for a great war should be sufficient to show the hollowness of such a suggestion. And yet the belief

that the War is but the inevitable outcome of a hatred born mainly of jealousy of Germany's industrial and commercial development, and that England has engineered the War in order to destroy a hated and dangerous competitor, is held not only by Germans. Strangely, it is held among certain neutrals by men who, like ourselves, born in Germany, have emigrated and made their homes among surroundings and under conditions more in harmony with the trend of twentieth-century civilization, and above all more congenial to men with a love for justice and freedom—we refer to German-Americans. It is true that they have not had the same facilities of observing and acquiring direct knowledge of the feeling towards Germany which existed in England before the War, but they may pardon us for saying that an independent and dispassionate examination does not provide them with any evidence to support the charge of English antagonism to Germany. They may answer that we are not impartial judges, owing to our devotion to the country of our adoption; they may even attribute our support of the British cause to the selfish ground that our material interests are bound up with the victory of the Allies, and contend that as citizens of a neutral country they are better qualified to judge than we whose sons are fighting against Germany. Yet they, like all neutrals, must admit that we possess qualifications not held by any other class of men to speak of Englishmen's sentiments towards Germans in official, professional, business, and private relations—both before and since the War. None could have watched with keener anxiety and deeper interest the relations between the two countries, none could have been more sensitive to every indi-

cation of hostile feeling, but, although we knew that at times a feeling of irritation did exist here, the cause was invariably to be found in acts or words of men in high places in Germany, in the disappointment and dismay at the refusal of the German Government and people to understand and appreciate the genuine desire of the British Government and people to remove suspicion and distrust.

As a striking and noble example of the spirit which animated Englishmen we recall Cecil Rhodes' endowment of fifteen Oxford scholarships for young men of German birth, to be nominated by the Emperor. It was a generous foundation inspired by that goodwill and strong desire to establish a good understanding between the two nations which the great Imperialist shared with the vast majority of his countrymen.

In spite of checks and disappointments, Englishmen continued to hope and strive for an improvement in the relations. We remember well the eager and widespread satisfaction with which the German Chancellor's public appreciation of Sir E. Grey's services in connexion with the Balkan crisis was received in this country. It was felt that at last Germany had begun to realize that England's foreign policy was dictated above all by a desire to preserve peace.

There never was *on this side* the slightest indication that the people wished for a quarrel with Germany or desired to involve her in a quarrel with Continental nations; what did exist was an apprehension that Germany might force a quarrel upon England; hence the relief which greeted every sign of a better understanding and of which our English-born friends made no secret in their discussions with us. Our associa-

tions with Englishmen were not limited to one class, because we ourselves did not form one class. We had the most diverse interests in politics, professions, art, finance, industry, and commerce, which we had in common with all the various classes of Englishmen and which brought us into close touch with them ; and the frankness and complete absence of reserve with which Anglo-German relations were discussed between us afforded proof of the genuineness of English sentiment towards Germany.

Commercial rivalry did exist and undoubtedly it produced in the minds of some manufacturers and others discomfort and anxiety, but to say that it caused resentment as far as the Government or the British public are concerned is a flagrant and palpable travesty of the truth ; to say that our Government deliberately engineered a war (and had the support of the public in the adventure) for the purpose of destroying the rival is a ridiculous and wicked attempt to deceive the German and other peoples. To begin with, the British public is neither so stupid nor so narrow-minded as to believe that the increased prosperity of another nation means ruin to England, and moreover such a belief would be altogether inconsistent with this country's unparalleled prosperity during the years immediately preceding the outbreak of war. There were two grounds on which Germany's great industrial attainments were viewed with uneasiness : (1) The extent to which the British public took advantage of the unfettered importation of German goods, and the marked preference it displayed for certain classes of German manufacture and the preference so frequently given to German competitors in the placing of contracts



by public bodies; (2) the monopoly which Germany was gaining in certain important industries and the consequent dependence on Germany of this country in respect of necessary articles of manufacture.

The first ground provides in itself irrefragable proof of the absence of jealousy. Had it existed both Government and public would, one must assume, have adopted the simple expedient of transferring their patronage to goods of British or some other manufacture in preference to an armed attack on the unwelcome provider. The idea is too ludicrous to deserve a moment's consideration—yet it would seem that German propagandists think it can be believed. As a matter of fact, Englishmen who thought of the matter at all held the opinion that a war between two countries which were so closely associated in commerce as Germany and England was so remote a contingency as to be practically out of the question. Some of us are interested in British industries, and we are entitled to say that so far from the public authorities (i.e. Government departments, municipalities, and corporations) exhibiting any signs of jealousy of the industrial progress of Germany, the charge may be levelled at them that they have favoured German industries to the detriment of British manufacturers. It is no secret that in recent years huge undertakings involving millions of money—both here and in the Colonies—have been entrusted to German firms, and that neither jealousy of Germany's financial gain nor a fear that Germany might abuse local knowledge thus acquired in directions prejudicial to the safety of the realm, was allowed to affect what were regarded as purely commercial relations between two friendly nations.

The second ground, viz. : Germany's monopoly of certain important industries, was no doubt one of national importance and one which in the opinion of some economists (and in the light of recent events their opinion, which some of us shared, was perhaps entitled to greater respect than it received) required the interference of the Government. But what kind of interference did they demand? Not war, but the expedient, so widely used by the German Government, of placing protective duties on articles the manufacture of which within the country it was thought desirable to encourage. The facts that the established Free Trade policy of this country was maintained and that the Germans enjoyed the fullest freedom in Colonial markets disprove any intention of strangling German trade, or even of hampering it by economic and legitimate means.

The charge that England, from mean and sordid motives, brought all this fearful misery, this terrible misfortune upon the world is one of which we find it difficult to speak with moderation. We know but too well how in spite of danger-signs the British Government and people clung almost stubbornly to the belief that a great and intelligent nation would not allow its Government, however despotic, however unscrupulous, to lay Europe in ruins. That Germany's official apologists find it necessary to make that charge shows to what straits their Government is driven in its efforts to deceive its own people, its Allies, and neutrals.

And in August, 1914, when England and Germany faced each other as enemies, where was the joy that at last the day had arrived when accounts could be settled with the hated rival? Where was the exultation that

the longed-for opportunity had come to spring at the adversary's throat? Not here, not in England. Consternation, bewilderment at the reckless and wicked iniquity of a Government which hurled Europe, striving for peace, into the abyss of war; pity for a people which had given the control of its destiny into the hands of an ambitious and unscrupulous caste—those were the feelings and sentiments uppermost in the minds of the British people. Hatred of the German people? Even when news reached us of the outbursts against England, of the attacks on the Embassy at Berlin, Englishmen were amazed and pained but willing to find excuses for the demonstration of feeling by a misguided populace. On the other hand, no one who was in London in those fateful days will forget the satisfaction and pride felt and expressed by Englishmen at the courtesy and respect shown by the British Government and public to the departing German Ambassador. There was deep anger and bitter resentment at the invasion of Belgium and the cynical repudiation of solemn international treaties, but it was directed against the German Government, not against the German people. The very remarkable fact—and one which gives the lie to the wild charges of English hatred and jealousy—was the distinction which even the great masses of the population endeavoured to draw between the guilt of the Prussian military oligarchy and the German people. Nobody will deny that this is a matter on which we are competent to speak.

It is true that a change came over the sentiments of the English people when they began to understand that which had lain hidden even from us—the real meaning

of Prussianized Germany. We know how most people in this country struggled, as we did, against the belief that the accounts of murder, arson, robbery, and outrage which came from Belgium could be true, and accepted them only when it was no longer possible to reject them.

The bitterness and sadness of our feelings on the day, which we had hoped and trusted we should never see, when war between the country of our birth and the country of our adoption had become inevitable, were as nothing compared with the poignancy of our sorrow when we realized to what methods the German authorities had descended. Yet we all know Englishmen whose sorrow was hardly less poignant. We are aware that the guilt of the German Army is denied, that the genuineness of the German diaries published in the appendix to the Report of Lord Bryce's Committee is called in question, and that the charge of forgery has been brought against the authors of that Report. It would be presumptuous and impertinent on our part to defend Lord Bryce and the eminent men who share with him the responsibility for the authenticity of the diaries against the venomous attacks by obscure and venal writers, but we may be permitted to say that every one of the diaries was seen and studied by one of us before the issue of the Report, and he bears witness to the scrupulous fairness and meticulous care with which they have been used. It is difficult to understand why the German authorities should be at such pains to deny the charges in face of their own admission and (incredible though it may seem) defence of the killing of civilian hostages. Terrible as the indictment of Lord Bryce's Report is, it contains little

that is more infamous than the shooting of men who had committed no offence, who were charged with none, but who were made to suffer for crimes alleged to have been committed, while they were in custody, by fellow-citizens over whom they could have no control. The open avowal of this monstrous doctrine amounts to the repudiation of a public right between nations and the rejection of a belief in honourable warfare.

Can Germans complain that when the full story of the reign of terror in Belgium became known, when its significance began to be realized, when as though to remove the last lingering doubt of the contempt in which Germany's rulers hold every consideration of humanity and justice they committed the inexpiable *Lusitania* crime, the feeling of the English people underwent a complete change and that the reaction was most violent with those who had held most tenaciously to their belief in German faith and German honour? Had but one voice been raised in Germany in condemnation of what must for ever rank as one of the foulest deeds in history, things might have been different even then! Instead of horror and shame the whole world stood aghast to find rejoicing and pride. The pre-war teaching had prepared the soil well; it was ready to receive the seed—more so than any of us imagined.

It is unfortunately the fact that certain classes of the British people have, at the instigation of a small section of the press and a few self-asserting politicians, given expression to this change of feeling in ungenerous and unjust treatment of British subjects of German origin, but this is regretted by the vast majority of responsible Englishmen and has received no encouragement whatever from the Government. We trust that

the antagonism born of resentment and suspicion will disappear as the people begin to understand that character and sentiment are influenced by environment rather than by blood, and that the men who have settled here have not been subjected to the influence of the spirit which dominates modern Germany. Meanwhile the ruthless manifestation of that spirit has robbed us of a cherished possession, and the loss hurts. We know on whom to lay the guilt. The men who succeeded in driving Germany into the War are the men who have debased and degraded her.

Germany pays with her treasure, with her blood and with her honour for the abject surrender to her master—the Prussian Militarist. Fighting for ‘a place in the sun’, Germany has lost her place in the world—not indeed because of the envy, jealousy, and hatred on the part of England, but because the world has learned that she is guided by the principle of a narrow, intolerant, and aggressive national fanaticism, disregarding every international obligation and devoid of all ideals of international life.





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